

BULLETIN

We *do* have the power

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by JACKIE SPAIN



n April 23, the provincial Liberal government brought together the six regional health authorities in Vancouver to announce radical changes to BC's health care system. Because Health Services Minister Colin Hansen deliberately left some details very vague, it took some time for health care advocates to figure out what the changes mean for patients and those of us who deliver the services.

I personally felt overwhelmed at the impending loss for many rural communities. How will we maintain the viability of our communities through all of this change? How will these communities adapt?

The changes are sweeping and complex.

For example, in Kimberley, the entire hospital was shut down with three weeks notice. What do you do with x-rays that need to be in accessible storage? Where is that storage? And who is responsible?

How does the lab staff cover workload and dismantle a lab at the same time?

Since the announcement that the Kimberley hospital would close, the workload has jumped as residents took their last opportunity to have their health care needs taken care of locally.

Ten days prior to the announcements of April 23, I have said a fond and sad goodbye to my dear friend Minnie McKinnon who was 92 years old, and I have said a fond and happy hello to my new grandson Walker Dennis McKinnon Lapins.

I have found that all these events together have sparked a great deal of introspective thinking. Minnie was a revered resident of the community of Field, often being referred to as the "Mayor of Field". At the end of her life, Minnie was a resident of our long-term care facility, and then of our now-closed extended care section of the Golden and District Hospital. Minnie timed her departure well, as I believe she would not have withstood the changes that were coming. With her, we say good bye to the past and an era where we perceived that we looked after those in society that needed it most.

With the arrival of my grandson Walker, a new legacy has started.

Our community served Minnie's needs for the duration of her life. I want to make sure that Walker has his needs met in his community for his whole life, and ... that the communities of the Kootenays will be there in all their splendour so that Walker can one day enjoy the rural life style with his children if that is his choice.

As citizens of British Columbia I believe we have a duty to have our voices heard. We are sometimes discouraged thinking that our one voice does not make a difference, but it does. The West Kootenay coalition

group has a saying â€˜The snowflake is the most delicate thing in the world but just look at the impact they can make when they stick together. In all parts of this province we have felt the power of that natural force.

Your voice *does* count. *Speak out* for your parents and senior friends. *Speak out* for your children and grandchildren and encourage them to do the same. Municipal elections are coming in November. Every citizen of this province has a stake in the system, so get involved and elect people who will represent *you*. HSA is full of talented, smart, well spoken people ... I know that we have lots of potential candidates. Get involved, help in a campaign ... or even better, run! 

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